



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

GO TO THE BEE

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PERMANENCE OF ARISTOCRACY

By Dr. DAVID STARR JORDAN

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

“THE Leisure Classes, the Chief Support of the Nation they adorn”—such was the topic of a remarkable sermon delivered not long ago to an audience of superior people, by the Reverend Vicar of Gillington, England, whose actual name I do not give lest my feeble words fail to interpret his lofty ideals. From the press notices that came under my eye, it appears that the admired and admirable vicar finds his mission in the salvation of British aristocracy through its complete restoration to the ranks of leisure. In his judgment the aristocrats or superior persons serve society best by standing as examples of human perfectibility. This is the end they should seek, through utter surcease from all worry, all effort and all personal hopes and desires.

The vicar would indeed make of the upper classes a group, not of hereditary rulers, but of elect exemplars of what humanity may become, a condition to be open to a chosen few to whom is granted release from the sordid side of life. From such relief the great body of the British people are of course excluded—not from any fault or deficiency of their own, but simply because there is not leisure enough to go around. Thus for the chosen the mass must live; the many gather honey for the few to enjoy. But in fairness—and this I take it is the vital part of the vicar’s contention—all should have an equal chance in the beginning.

A rationally organized society would then consist of two classes which for convenience the vicar might call the laborers and the leisurers. To the former belongs the capitalist as well as the workman; all indeed who work with hand or tongue or pen or brain labor alike. The leisurer alone enjoys that perfect serenity which comes from fearing nothing, wanting nothing, hoping for nothing. True happiness rests on a division of duty. A natural cleavage lies between those who create and those who enjoy, each condition having its own peculiar delight. Between the two yawns a great gulf which society crosses only at its peril.

The vicar’s discourse harks back to the words of Solomon, “Go to the ant; consider her ways and be wise,” an injunction inciting alike to modesty and to thrift, two virtues of which the ant is a

model. She knows her place and keeps it. Aspiration goes with aviation; having no wings, she never tries to fly.

But in addressing the leisurer the vicar would modify his text: "Go rather to the bee; consider his ways and be wise." Physically the bee resembles the ant, but his social system is organized on a more exalted basis. With him, the leisure class is unquestionably the chief support of the society it adorns. And now to make clear the vicar's appeal, I find it necessary to amplify the too meager report given in the *Girlington Guardian*, and without holding the speaker closely responsible, I may draw for the moment from the fascinating observations of the noted apiarist of Brussels, Maurice Maeterlinck.

Two salient facts at once appear: first, bee society maintains its own aristocracy; second, its leisurers, having no hereditary claim for distinction, are chosen by lot and by no effort of their own. As the young bees are about to hatch, their faithful nurses construct a few cells of extra size and feed the occupants on a special food, the "royal jelly" of the apiarist. These selected individuals, the "queens," then grow up in an atmosphere of leisure. To produce the harmonious and perfect bee for which the toiling workers exist is the culmination of the apiarian system.

In carrying the analogy into human society, the essential point (as I think the vicar would agree) is that among men as among bees, no injustice shall be done. Leisurer and laborer must both exist, but as both are of one lineage, each should have an equal chance for the great prize of existence. That "the rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man's the gold" is literally true. Royal jelly and a royal cell make the bee-aristocrat. The difference between queen and worker is purely one of bringing up; the two are of the same blood, the queen becomes regal without effort of her own.

By like means human society may breed its aristocrats—so reads the lesson to be learned from the bee. The queen exists not for her own sake, nor by inherited right. Neither should a lord among men, his only true function being to round out the humanity of his fellows, show what man has it in him to be if brought up without work or worry, marred by no trace of struggle, no fear of defeat, by nothing which wrinkles the brow, makes callous the hands, nor hardens the heart! Lacking this perfect ideal, end and aim, humanity can never realize itself.

Perfection, by the very nature of things, is denied the laborer. Yet how vital it is that perfection should exist! Plainly, however, only a few can be leisurers, though in life's grand lottery all may start alike. The needs of the hour call for the "man with the hoe," the woman at the washtub. Some must toil and spin that the human lily may be properly arrayed. Mark, too, the perfect rose,

"its own excuse for being," yet dependent on stem and leaves and roots for very existence. Moreover, its glowing petals are but leaves transformed and perfected. Thus from the lily or the rose one may draw the same lesson as from the bee and the ant.

In his implied criticism of the British aristocracy of the renowned Victorian era, the vicar proceeds with becoming modesty. It would seem indeed presumptuous in the holder of a living, the gift of a gentleman of the county, to say one word in dispraise of conditions as they are. The very essence of organized religion is conservatism.

Yet some one must turn his face towards the light, and every student of history knows that the "Decline of Aristocracy," as defined by one of its illustrious examples, Mr. Arthur Ponsonby, is now imminent. The only way of avoiding decadence is to place aristocracy on a democratic basis, as it were, to open its doors to all, but at the same time keep the passage narrow so that few can enter. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way" that leadeth to perfection.

The Victorian system is open to cavil on three sides: it is hereditary: it is open to invasion by wealth, it is used as a reward for achievement.

As for heredity, one easily sees that mere aristocratic descent does not guarantee a perfect leisurer. "Blue blood" tends to run thin, and in-and-in breeding plays havoc with the human stock as well as with dogs and horses. Furthermore, inheritance smacks of privilege, and the iconoclastic Georgian Age will have none of it. No youth is now willing to follow his father's trade. The son of a tailor no longer sits cross-legged on a bench if fate has taken him early in hand, the son of a non-conformist preacher becomes prime minister—and one never knows *where* it is all going to stop! But any healthy boy, caught young enough, is soon aligned with the customs and opinions of his entourage. Set among gentlemen, nothing is easier than to act like a gentleman! As a matter of fact every wise butler soon acquires a manner as lordly as that of his master, whom he often instructs in the higher etiquette. Frequently he has had longer experience, and has given to items of behavior more serious thought. A sympathetic moisture of the eye and a gentle lowering of the voice in delicate moments may come as natural to him as to a bishop. Stephen Leacock of Montreal, a noted American tourist, gives an amusing account of his call upon an ambassador of the United Kingdom. At the end of a discussion concerning the weather and the future of the Empire, he was still doubtful as to whether he had met the ambassador or his butler. To test the matter, therefore, he slipped a gold sovereign into the hand of his host. The coin was accepted, but in such a detached and dignified

manner that the visitor's uncertainty was not dispelled by his maneuver.

With a "young person," the process of adaptation is even more rapid and sure. The charwoman's daughter brought up as a lady yields to none in ladylike perfection. Napoleon even went so far as to propose that women should have no hereditary rank at all, but content themselves with the title of their consorts. Presumably his experience with the stalwart insistence of his otherwise plebeian sisters whom he had personally ennobled determined his attitude in that regard. But most of us are familiar with the career of the Honorable Lady Burnett, a woman of humble origin as her friends admit—once a milkmaid or (according to traducers) a barmaid, who became through an exalted marriage "the arbitress of the elegances for all the region about her husband's manor house." From the *Morning Post* one learns that "she used, queen-like, to reign; nay, pour at tea in the newest and tightest of white gloves," and with that undefinable *je ne sais quoi* which marks the true aristocrat!

An aristocracy has been defined as "a social superstructure reared on a foundation of bestness." There is but one permanent basis for "bestness." This is implied in the thousand year old motto of the aristocratic Winchester College, "Manners makyth man," or in the modern vernacular, "Handsome is as handsome does."

The vicar, himself of humble birth but aristocratic connections, admits freely that it is too late in the day to lay stress on lineage. We all claim Adam as a forbear, and not one of us has ever had even a single ancestor weak enough to die in infancy. Leisurer or laborer, each has weathered the storm; in that sense, all are noble alike. Genealogists also affirm that we unmixed English people are all of Plantagenet stock, most of us through the first three Edwards, descended from William, Alfred and Charlemagne. Indeed, one eminent authority classes all Englishmen together as the "inbred descendants of Charlemagne," and Charlemagne (as we know) was at the head of a League of Nations, being at once King of France, Emperor of Germany, and Overlord of Europe. Noble blood indeed is ours, but unfortunately so many share it that it can not serve as a test of aristocracy.

Again, large numbers of our so-called nobility have arisen through long years of struggle directed toward that end. Social extrication is a form of hard work, and labor of whatever kind mars the soul as it wrinkles the brow. A furrowed face is of itself a badge of serfdom. A mind too alert, an ambition too urgent, tends to defeat the purpose of social adornment. To diffuse sweetness and light is not an arduous occupation. Indeed to give

thought to it or to make it a result of definite effort is to fail in the most important element. The leisurer who goes down into the East End to mend the manners of the poor would do better to confine himself to awarding the conventional goose and bottle of ale at the happy season of Christmas. Those who have pursued this policy enjoy a devout gratitude heightened by its rarity. If life for the laborer was all ale and goose—or beer and skittles, as vulgarly paraphrased—no one would know his place, and the barriers betwixt laborer and leisurer so carefully built up in the long centuries of England's glory would be completely broken down.

Browning paints the ideal leisurer as a king who "lived long ago in the morning of the world" with a forehead "calm as a babe new born." This is an enchanting ideal, but the further description (so familiar that I need not quote it here) does not fit their lordships of to-day. No one would take it for a portrait of Northcliffe, Carson, or Birkenhead, whose bustling activities keep the realm in turmoil. An aristocracy founded on labor of mind or hand is not a class of leisurers. Like my Lord Bottlebrush and the "Duchess of Draggletail" in Thackeray's satire, however high the circle in which they move, their manifest lack of noble repose only swells the confusion.

Moreover, no genuine aristocracy can be founded solely on wealth. The "boulder-nobility"—as an irreverent press styles them—are noble in their own eyes alone. In an exalted circle money should never be thought of, much less mentioned! The bee queen builds no cells and gathers no honey. No increment of beebread or royal jelly is due to her own activities, or received by inheritance. Queen and environment are alike parts of one system. So it should be with a true aristocracy. No quest of gold, no promotion of enterprise, no regret over the past, no worry for the future, no will to know, no call to govern, no mission to control, no fear of loss, no hope of gain, ought to intrude to break the perfect peace. Kept in place by a reverent society, the Lord of Leisure need only pose as the glint of a sunbeam across the trail of the toilers, merely strew flowers along the pathway of life, in short be like

Roses in their bloom
Casting their petals ever on the grass
Over the way the Beautiful must pass.

II

To all this there is an intensely practical side. If aristocracy is to endure (and without it this would be a dreary world indeed) it must be constituted aright. It must reject the false bases of heredity, effort and wealth. It must not be the reward of dis-

tion, nor be attainable by any competitive examination. Its door should open to all on equal terms, even though straight the gate and narrow the way. The present House of Lords, now swollen to seven hundred members, including almost everybody able and willing to pay the price, will die of its own accord. Let it alone. Let the climbers of yesterday keep on climbing, while we remove the ladders behind them. Let the men who replenish the party treasuries receive in the name of our gracious King—our sole true aristocrat—whatsoever honors their patriotism deserves; but for the good of society let us build a new class in a new way. Should we fail in that endeavor the iconoclasts of the day will cast us all into the melting-pot from which no leisurer returns, an upshot the vicar would sadly deprecate.

To select noblemen by primogeniture is a process comparable to choice by loaded dice; the cast is made before the heir is born. Nothing could be more undemocratic, nothing in reality more unfair to men and women of the race in general. Then let our lords be chosen by lot from among the people at large, let us pick a certain number of babies to be our future leisurers, and feed them on royal jelly¹ or the nearest parallel to that condiment our gracious King may secure.

All expense involved should of course be carried by the people. In the United Kingdom are some 48,000,000 men and women. Let each pay alike; the assessment would then be so small that no one would even notice it. Let each contribute say a penny yearly for social inflorescence—for the perfected blossom of humanity. Such trifling levy would amount in the aggregate to £200,000 sterling, which, judiciously invested, would yield an assured annual income of £10,000, a sum quite adequate to provide for a leisurer throughout life. And the contribution by everybody of one shilling, a tax still absurdly small, would support twelve members of the new aristocracy each year.

The necessary sum once collected, the infant chosen should be entirely healthy, and so attested by a Court physician accustomed to the needs of the leisure classes. It ought also to be a manchild, and its future mate, having no title in her own right, would become a "Lady" by courtesy, even as now the wife of the knighted grocer or jockey is recognized as "Lady" Jones or Atkins because her husband has been touched by the flat of the King's sword and allowed to write "Sir" before his name. Only through an impartial selection may aristocracy and democracy be satis-

¹ This expression is of course purely figurative, because no product of Cross and Blackwell serves our indicated purpose. It is with the general problem of perfected environment that we have to deal.

factorily reconciled; and only when begun before effort, ambition or deterioration has set in can the budding leisurer be adequately trained by nurse and butler in the thoughts and manners proper to a perfect lord. Otherwise, less lovely traits might have become stiffened beyond remedy.

As his lordship grows up, the necessary allowance should come to him in regular sums only. He should never forestall, never hoard, never gamble, never speculate, never go into trade, never run into debt, never have anything left over after Christmas! He should support society as society has supported him; but chiefly he and the lady he may happily choose must remain through life "on the hills as gods together, careless of mankind."

True, as the noble Lord Tennyson once observed, "kind hearts are more than coronets," but there is nothing in the plan to inhibit possession of both at once. A coronet, moreover, may be very becoming as well as very welcome to My Lady. For our new-made lord will never marry for money nor as a rule where money is—all dowry acquired being turned over to the state; and what more exquisite pleasure than that of a young maiden unexpectedly chosen for the high distinction of a coronet! Let us also notice the amazing widening of the possible range of choice when no dowry need be sought.

Doubtless a new title ought to be devised for the consummate flower of leisure. Lord, Duke, Earl, Knight—all these hark back to the discarded emblems of war, "the faded fancies of an elder world." The vicar himself, I believe, was undecided, but the plan developed from hints given in his discourse should not fail just because a suitable name is not immediately forthcoming. The hellenistic term, "Bianthine," "flower of life," would be appropriate, but it seems rather long, used as we are to the abrupt Saxon "Lord and Lady," or the Norman "Sir." "Flovite" (*flos-vitæ*) might do; represented by the letters F. V. it would be a natural contrast to M. P., and a pleasing reminiscence of F. F. V., the designation of certain *Élite* of the United States of America. This again suggests that the word *Élite* itself, a good Norman expression much valued by our Gallic allies, may be the term we are seeking.

In any case, the title selected should in some way indicate one chosen from among many, first among equals, the bloom of existence, the triumph of aspiring democracy reaching the goal of perfection amidst the leaven and the levelling of the commonry. And we hope that the admirable vicar may find ample support in his noble crusade to make the British peerage once more a counsel of perfection.